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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000290

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/AS FRAZER, AF/SE NATSIOS AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#) [US](#)
SUBJECT: SPLM: PLAN "B"ACKFIRE

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Classified By: CDA Cameron Hume, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

Political Evolution, Not Confrontation

11. (C) In a February 23 conversation with USAID Mission Director and Poloff, Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Deputy Secretary General for the Northern Sector Yasser Arman described a crack in the National Congress Party's (NCP) control of Sudan, comparing it to "perestroika." He said that this crack presented the USG with an opportunity to box Sudan within a constructive political process. By contrast, moving ahead with Plan B would provide the hard-line elements of the regime with the excuse they wanted to declare a state of emergency, dissolve the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), block elections, and stall the country's nascent political evolution. He emphasized that change in Sudan should come through international support for the "development of internal structures," i.e. opposition parties, democratic institutions, and civil society. As an example of a positive step, he cited the SPLM's recent re-organization to be a more effective player on the national level. Arman acknowledged that a methodical political process would take time but said it would be more successful in changing Sudan's political landscape in the long-term than punitive measures. He recommended a strategic approach to the resolution of the Darfur conflict and stated that the SPLM leadership had endorsed the Party taking a more active role in this effort during their recent Politburo meeting in Yei.

Plan B: Excuse for a State of Emergency

12. (C) Arman had traveled to Tripoli on February 20 with President Bashir, National Security and Intelligence (NISS) head Salah Ghosh, Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie, and other NCP figures. Based on his discussions with the NCP leaders during this trip, Arman said they viewed Plan B as "joke" and that they were confident that the regime could weather any of the punitive measures of Plan B, which must be weak or the U.S. would never have leaked its existence to the press. They dismissed the threat of military action, calculating that the USG is over-extended in Iraq and Afghanistan, and believe the USG would not risk the disruption of the international markets that would result from sanctioning oil companies that operate in Sudan.

Instead, the NCP viewed Plan B as a mechanism to consolidate their grip on power. Arman noted that the regime had entered into negotiations on the CPA and the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in order to normalize their relations with the U.S. Plan B would signify -- once and for all -- that this path was no longer viable, and without the continued incentive of international legitimacy, the NCP hard-liners would move to halt the evolution of democratic institutions by declaring a state of emergency.

Strategic Engagement

¶3. (C) Arman suggested an alternate path of strategic engagement with the NCP to advance the political process in Darfur. He said that Sudan's attendance at the summit in Tripoli was designed to give the international community the impression that they were interested in negotiation and to divide the European countries and China from the USG's more confrontational position. Arman said that the USG should "be smarter than the NCP" and use their interest in negotiation to contain them within a constructive process. He reiterated the SPLM's interest in organizing a conference of DPA non-signatory leaders, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM)/Minawi, and the Government to jump-start peace negotiations within the framework of the DPA. He urged that A/S Frazer or S/E Natsios discuss this idea with First Vice President Salva Kiir. Arman also said that the USG, in cooperation with the SPLM, should work to defuse bilateral tensions between Chad and Sudan by facilitating a staged-process of confidence-building measures between the two countries. (Note: Arman traveled to Nyala on February 24 to highlight the SPLM's renewed interest in Darfur and advance an expected trip by Kiir to the region in the near future. End note.)

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Comment

¶4. (S/NF) The recent trips of Defense Minister Abdulrahim Mohammed Hussein to Iran and Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal to Khartoum, as well as the upcoming visit of Iranian President Ahmedinejad to Sudan, are indications of the friends that the Sudanese government will embrace if it views engagement with the West as dead. Based on Arman's assessment, the hard-liners in the NCP, who favor these alliances, would use even the first tier of Plan B options as an excuse to advance their agenda and scuttle the CPA. Sustained USG political engagement with specific benchmarks--such as subtle encouragement for democratic development, negotiation with the non-signatories, and the lessening of tensions with Chad-- would likely provide a result more in line with our policy goals. End comment.

¶5. (C) Tripoli minimize considered.
HUME